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DONIZETTI:

HIS LIFE AND WORKS.

BY M. DE THÉMINES.

Translated for the ART JOURNAL from the French

BY MARGARET CECILIA CLEVELAND.

XV.

Donizetti was so well satisfied with the success of *Lucia*, that he felicitated his collaborator, the author of the libretto, and hastened, in the view of doing something better than paying him more compliments, however sincere and flattering they might be, to order of him a second poem, this time for the Teatro, of Venice.

Cammarano chose *Belisario*; the musician made a grimace on hearing the name of the Roman general, for at that time Italy had already commenced to show an antipathy to martial subjects; and the echo of the famous lines:

"Who will deliver us from the Greeks and Romans?" had resounded across the Alps. But the pe-

rusal of the *scenario* of Cammarano's libretto sufficed to divest him of his prejudice. And, had he not been successful with the *Esule di Roma*, from which really commenced the cycle of his luminous career?

He therefore accepted *Belisario*, and wisely, for the subject was very dramatic, and the poet drew great effects from it.

This score had one of the most legitimate of successes at the Teatro Fenice of Venice. It was the opera *d'obbligo* of the carnival of 1836. From thence it passed to Naples, where the doors of the San Carlo were open to receive it, and where Mme. Ronzi de Begnino and Basadonna were enthusiastically applauded. During several seasons it never left the *affiche*.

We have arrived at the summer of 1836. Donizetti had returned to Naples. The Teatro Nuovo had been obliged to close, the Impresario finding himself without means. There were a whole troop of artists, of members of the orchestra, chorus singers, etc., all in the most urgent want of the necessities of life. Fortunately this company of virtuosos in abeyance had a happy inspiration. They sought Donizetti and said to him:

"Maestro, we are in despair. There is only you who can save us."

"What shall I do, my children?"

"Write a new opera, be it only one act. We will open the theatre at our own risk; we will play your opera, and the house will be full."

"You will have your opera in eight days."

The artists would have thrown themselves at his feet, and whilst they lost themselves in thanks:

"Go, go," said the master, "you will prevent me from procuring a libretto."

It was then who should first reach the stairway.

Donizetti went to Cammarano:

"I want a short act in three days."

Cammarano was the most methodical poet that I have ever known. He made verses, as a clerk makes his accounts. He did not fall down at this unusual request of the master, but Donizetti saw that he had nothing to hope for in that quarter.

He went to Bidera. Bidera placed himself at the window. The weather was delicious. At such times Bidera was accustomed to walk.

"Impossible! maestro," said he. "There are so many people in the street! I could not work here as usual."

Same refusal from all the other librettists.

Weary of the combat, Donizetti said to himself:

"To the devil with them all! Why shall I not myself write this act? The verses will not be as finished, but what matter! The music is the important thing. To the work, and leave these idlers to themselves. *E son poeta anch'io!*"

He returned home, and placing himself at his desk, sought a subject. From dint of searching, he recollected a little comic piece, entitled *La Sonnette de nuit*. He had not the pamphlet, but he had memory, that iron memory which had never failed him. He set himself to the work, and wrote down his verses. They were not worse than most of those of the librettists of the ancient *répertoire*.

Then, underneath, he strewed the most brilliant and the freshest blossoms of his fancy, and made of it a charming little opera *bouffe*, which he entitled: *Il Campanello*.

Ronconi, the celebrated Ronconi, did not disdain to create the rôle of the apothecary. The success was immense. The musician shared the honors of the poet.

The librettists were alarmed. "*Diable! diable!*" said they murmuring, "but if he writes himself his librettos, we are lost?"

This complaint reached Donizetti. He laughed in his beard.

"Ah, is it so?" he said. "Well, I am asked for an opera in one act for the Fondo; I am hurried for time. If I address myself to these grumblers, it will never be done; I will myself make this little poem. The librettists will cry, but let them reassure themselves; it will be the last.

It was thus that he took *Le Chalet* and made *Betty*.

SIGHT-SEEING IN GERMANY.

(CONTINUED.)

According to the street boys and street organs Arditì is the most popular man in Germany. They whistle him and grind him morning, noon, and night, until at last you lose all patience with him. The Bacio, whether musically or practically considered, is always diverting, especially as a duet; but you may have too much of it. By the way, I wonder how it's spelt, with one or two c's? I never knew. It is not of much importance, as the number of c's perhaps serve to indicate the nature of the particular article referred to—thus, *Il Bacio dolce* may safely be written with one, the *Ba* in such cases being long; *Il Baccio staccato* with two, the *cio* being short; *Il Baccio rubato* (*anglice*, smack) with three, and so on *ad infinitum* if the original intention has become impossible to carry out, or the action itself is a mere matter of form. William Chappell says the Bacio was even more popular in the seventeenth century than it is at the present day. The learned antiquary seems to have forgotten Arditì when making the interesting statement, which, moreover, let us hope, is somewhat exaggerated. He declares it was a custom to which the Puritans had a real or pretended aversion, and that before their time it was not only customary to salute a partner at the commencement and end of a dance, but also on first meeting a fair friend in the morning or on taking leave of her. How is it possible to keep one's temper on hearing that such practices were ever put an end to? Chaucer in the "*Sompnour's Tale*" relates how the friar performed the act of gallantry in question with all due activity and zeal. As soon as the mistress of the house enters the room

— "he riseth up full courtly
And her embraceth in his armes narrow
And kisseth her sweet, and chirkeeth as a sparrow
With his lippes."

Cavendish in his "*Life of Cardinal Wolsey*" gives an account of going to the "Castle of M. de Crequi," a French nobleman, "and very nigh of blood to Louis XII., where," he says, "I being in a fair, great dining chamber, where the table was covered for dinner, I attended my lady's coming; and, after she came thither out of her own chamber, she received me most gently, like one of noble estate, having a train of twelve gentlewomen. And when she with her train came all out, she said to me—'Forasmuch as ye be an Englishman, whose custom is in your country to kiss all ladies and gentlewomen without offence, and although it be not so here in this realm (of France), yet will I be so bold as to kiss you, and so shall all my maidens.' By means whereof I kissed my lady and all her women. Then went she to her dinner, being as nobly served as I have seen any of her estate here in England."

In the same reign, Erasmus writes to a friend, describing the beauty, the courtesy, and gentleness of the English ladies, in glowing terms, and this custom as one never sufficiently to be praised. He tells him that if he were to come to England he would never be satisfied with remaining for ten years, but must wish to live and die here.

A Spanish pamphlet in the library of the British Museum, dated 1804, gives an account of the ceremonies observed during the residence of the Duke de Frias (Ambassador Plenipotentiary from the Spanish Court, in England), on the accession of James I. In that, the writer says—"The ambassador kissed Her Majesty's hands, craving at the same time permission to salute the ladies present, a custom of which the non-observance on such occasions is deeply resented by the fair sex of this country;" and leave was accordingly given.—*Ellis's Letters on English History*.

Again, when the celebrated Bulstrode Whitelocke was at the court of Christina, Queen of Sweden, as ambassador from Cromwell, he waited on her on May-day to invite her "to take the air, and some little collation, which he had provided as her humble servant." Having obtained her consent, she, with several ladies of her court accompanied him; and Her Majesty, "both in supper-time and afterwards," being "full of pleasantries and gaiety of spirits, among other frolics, commanded him to teach her ladies the English mode of salutation; which, after some pretty defences, their lips obeyed, and Whitelocke most readily."—*Gentleman's Magazine*.

From these passages, it is evident that the custom was as much admired by the ladies of other countries as it was peculiar to this.

Whytford's "*Pype of Perfection*" has been quoted to prove that objection was taken to the Bacio at the time of the Reformation; but Whytford objected, not only to kissing, but also to every sort of salutation, even to shaking of hands, among religious persons. He says, "It becometh not, therefore, the persones religious to follow the manner of secular persones, that in their congresses, or common meetyngs or departyngs, do use to kisse, take hands, or such other touchings."

John Bunyan gives an amusing account of his scruples on the subject in his "*Grace Abounding*:"—"When I have seen good

men salute those women that they have visited, or that have visited them, I have my objections against it: and when they have answered that it was but a piece of civility, I have told them that it was not a comely sight. Some, indeed, have urged the holy kiss; but, then, I have asked them why they made balks? Why did they salute the most handsome and let the ill-favored go?" This last question was, no doubt, rather perplexing to the good men to answer; but here Bunyan proves that very few were troubled by his scruples. The abandonment of the custom is said to have been "a part of that French code of politeness which Charles II. introduced on his restoration." The last traces of its existence are perhaps in one or two letters from country gentlemen, in the "*Spectator*," one of which occurs in No. 240. The writer relates of himself that he had always been in the habit, even in great assemblies, of saluting all the ladies round; but a town-bred gentleman had lately come into the neighborhood and introduced his "fine reserved airs." "Whenever," says the writer, "he came into a room, he made a profound bow and fell back, then recovered with a soft air and made a bow to the next, and so on. This is taken for the present fashion, and there is no young gentleman within several miles of this place who has been kissed ever since his first appearance among us."

And all these classical quotations and the remarks thereon are to be found in William Chappell's interesting book about old tunes, in which are love ditties innumerable by Arditìs of that happy period when the Bacio was a national institution and "all the go," not only as it is now, but in a far more satisfactory form. It is still the rage in Germany, as the street boys and organ boys hourly prove, while the ecstatic way in which the men embrace each other in public, shows that, as a practice, it is still most popular. The old fashion excited the indignation of my friends, who declared it was monstrous that men, especially military men, should kiss each other in the streets. An organ under my window playing the celebrated waltz tune in *Do*, in spite of my "don't" and a reward to go into the next street, gave rise to all that has been said on this delicate subject. The organ has moved on, and is now, *Laus Deo*, out of hearing, so that the account of our travels can be continued in peace and quietness.

By the time we reached Hanover, the *douanier* at Harburg, and his "insolence of office," were forgotten in the pleasant anticipation of all we were to see in the capital town. But disappointment awaited us. Rain—remorseless, uncompromising rain, blighted our prospects, and blasted all our hopes. It is impossible to do any sight-seeing cheerfully in a deluge. At least we found it so. Then, again, Hanover itself was shedding tears, and to be cheerful in a town of mourning is even more impossible. We alighted at the British Hotel, and, the morning following our arrival, we hired a broken-down vehicle, which took us to the summer palace of the banished royal family, but the summer palace was shut up, and looked very dreary and miserable in the wet. We went to some of the principal shops in the town; they were deserted, and their keepers, when interrogated, followed the example of the weather, and wept like so many children at the loss they had experienced in the forced departure of the Court. "Ah," said one,